

Won't you be my neighbor? A Guide to Connecting Caring Communities



Connecting Caring Communities Partnership
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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Won't you be my neighbor?

By Fred M. Rogers

It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood,
A beautiful day for a neighbor.
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?...

It's a neighborly day in this beauty wood,
A neighborly day for a beauty.
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?...

I've always wanted to have a neighbor just like you.
I've always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you.

So, let's make the most of this beautiful day.
Since we're together we might as well say:
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?
Won't you be my neighbor?
Won't you please,
Won't you please?
Please won't you be my neighbor?

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Esther Hussey (right), a resident of the Layton Blvd. neighborhood, and **Gwen Jackson** (left), a resident of Milwaukee's west side, have become connected through their participation in Milwaukee's Connecting Caring Communities Partnership. They share a strong commitment to activism and work hard to improve the lives of older adults in Milwaukee County. Esther and Gwen hope someday to launch a radio program of their own.

About this Guide

There is a growing trend across the country to look at communities from the perspective of older adults. This perspective allows us to see that the ordinary things we do everyday may pose big problems to someone with frailties. The grocery store may be too far away for someone who no longer drives; the traffic patterns and stoplights may not allow someone with limited mobility to cross the street in time; people move away, and with everyone's busy lives, there are fewer opportunities nowadays to get to know your neighbor. As communities think about retaining their older adult residents, they are learning three fundamental things:

- 1) Older adults want choices about where to age – whether it is staying in their home or apartment, or moving.
- 2) People in general, and particularly older adults, want to feel connected to their communities in some way, and to each other.
- 3) Communities benefit from being connected to older adults.



“Elder-friendly” communities are sprouting up all over the country. The AdvantAge Initiative, a project of the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, is a leader in the field of promoting elder-friendly communities, having developed a tool to measure the extent to which a community can call itself elder-friendly. The survey tool uses a set of 33 indicators organized around four essential components measuring the extent to which a community:

- addresses basic needs
- promotes social and civic engagement
- optimizes physical and mental health and well-being
- maximizes independence for frail and disabled people¹

In collaboration with the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, the U.S. Administration on Aging in 2005 named Milwaukee County as a winner in its “Livable Communities for All Ages Competition.” Milwaukee’s award for overall excellence in the large communities category was one of three given nationally to communities “having a comprehensive approach to improving multiple components of community livability.”²

Milwaukee County, through the Connecting Caring Communities partnership, has developed its own unique approach to becoming a more livable community by connecting older adults with people and organizations/businesses in their communities. Milwaukee County is one of 18 communities funded under the Community Partnerships for Older Adults Program

¹ “Indicators List: Essential Elements of an Elder Friendly Community”, from the website of the AdvantAge Initiative, Visiting Nurse Service of New York, <http://www.vnsny.org/advantage/indicators>

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Administration on Aging and the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, 2005 Livable Communities for All Ages Competition Case Studies

(CPFOA) of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, with local funding provided by the Helen Bader Foundation, Faye McBeath Foundation, and the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. There are two key concepts underlying the CPFOA Program:

- 1) Community-generated solutions for developing systems of long term care are essential because there is no one-size-fits-all program that can adequately meet the complex needs of older adults in a diverse society; and
- 2) The best ways of improving long term care and supportive services systems originate from strong community partnerships.³



In Milwaukee, we have embraced the philosophy of the CPFOA program and have taken it one step further, believing **there is no one-size-fits-all program to connect older adults with their communities; it must be done one community at a time, developing in each a committed partnership.** We define community very loosely – it can mean a building, a neighborhood, a city or village. In Milwaukee, our efforts have resulted in the development of partnerships in two communities, with two more community initiatives underway.

This guide outlines lessons learned in Connecting Caring Communities' first two community partnerships – Layton Blvd. and Sherman Park, along with early feedback from our newest initiatives in the Prospect/Farwell and West Allis/West Milwaukee communities. Each community is distinct, yet there are commonalities in terms of what has worked thus far. These findings can be useful in developing additional community initiatives throughout Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, and the nation. This guide is intended to fuel interest in, and excitement about, being a part of a community partnership.

Just as older adults benefit from being connected to their communities, especially in terms of reducing feelings of isolation, communities benefit from connections with older adults in terms of resident stability, historical perspective, economic impact on area businesses, and their willingness to give back in some way.⁴ Restoring neighborliness to neighborhoods is at the core of this project.

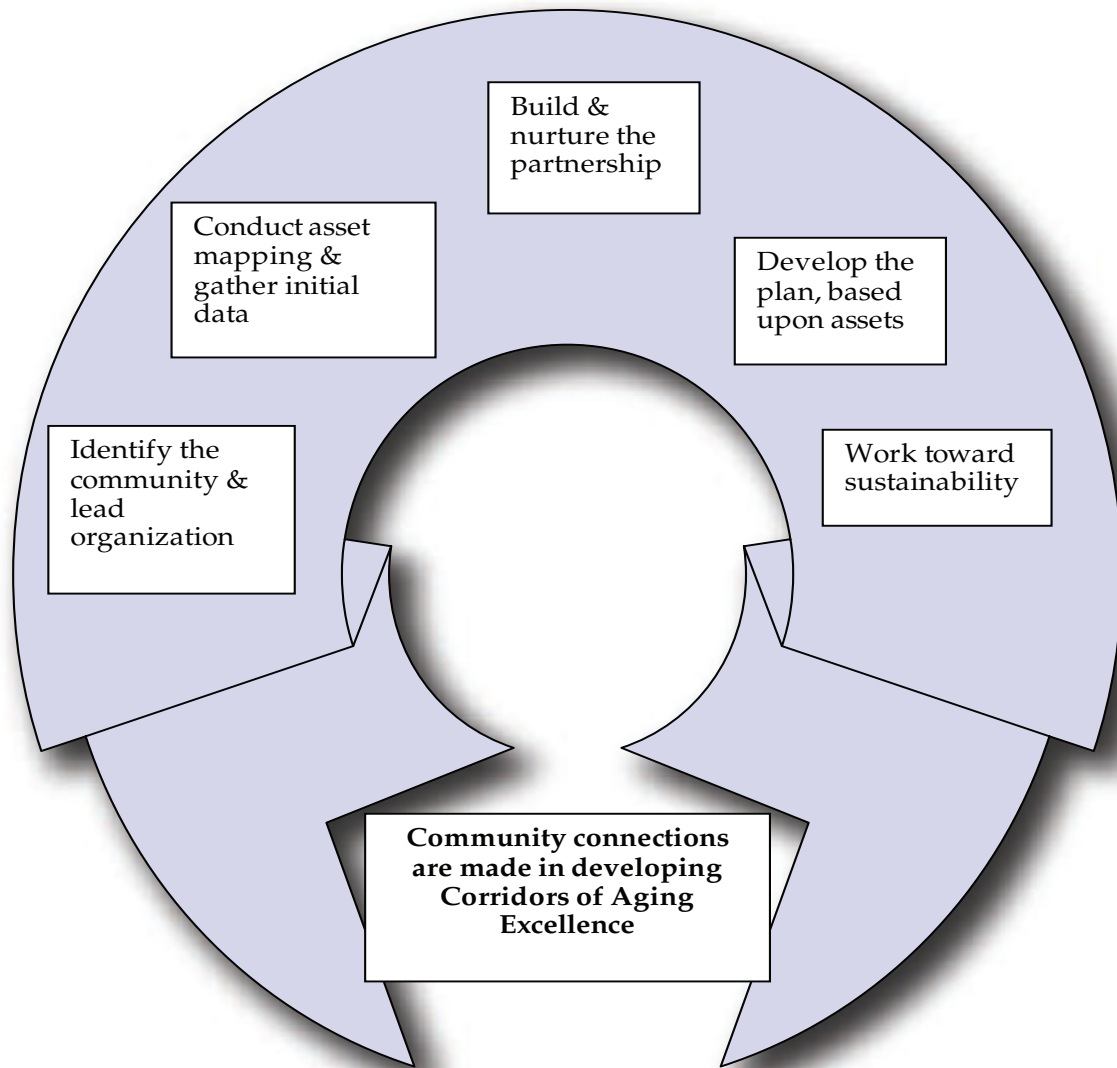
The guide is organized to provide an overview of essential components in the process to develop elder-friendly neighborhoods, based upon the experience of Connecting Caring Communities. Examples from our two community partnerships are used to illustrate key points. The overview is followed by a checklist summarizing the key points and the personal stories of three older adults involved in some way with Connecting Caring Communities.

³ Community Partnerships for Older Adults, "Community View" briefing paper developed by CPFOA in 2007, www.partnershipsforolderadults.org.

⁴ Kretzmann, John P. and McKnight, John L., *Building Communities from the Inside Out*, Skokie, IL: ACTA Publications, 1993, pp. 52-53.

Milwaukee's Connecting Caring Communities Partnership

Developing Corridors of Aging Excellence – Key components



Step 1: Identifying potential communities & their assets

In a big picture sense, our approach to community planning is based on the work of John Kretzmann and John McKnight of Northwestern University's Asset-Based Community Development Institute in creating the strategy of asset-based community development.⁵

⁵ Kretzmann & McKnight

According to Kretzmann and McKnight, “The key to neighborhood regeneration... is to locate all of the available local assets, to begin connecting them with one another in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness, and to begin harnessing those local institutions that are not yet available for local development purposes.”⁶ A traditional planning approach begins with deficits and needs. It labels a community as deficient in some way, and the solutions are often sought from professional helpers rather than from local residents. The beginning of the process, when needs are first identified, can be overwhelming and can lead to hopelessness. Instead, starting with a community’s assets has enabled us to identify communities with great potential and many connections to be made as we take steps toward developing corridors of aging excellence.⁷ The key question, posed by Tom Mosgaller of the Asset-Based Community Institute: “Are we strengthening the natural relationships/networks in the community, or replacing them?”



Key components in choosing a community

- Identifiable boundaries/sense of neighborhood identity
- Strong lead agency anchored in and committed to the community
- Lead agency or partner organization connected to community older adults
- Basic knowledge of where the older adults live and the traditional resources available/not available to them

Summary: Look at places where there is something going on in terms of interest or leveraging. Is there an organization committed to improving its neighborhood? Is there a community with a strong identity ready to form a partnership around older adults? While our community initiatives vary greatly, the types of things older adults across the communities want is much the same. It is the assets of each community that really determines the best approach to take in developing and sustaining partnerships.

The Sherman Park Community Association's interest in assisting older adults to remain in their houses is important to the health of this neighborhood because they are homeowners, often are a stable influence in the neighborhood, and sometimes play an important role in raising their extended families in a safe, nurturing neighborhood. – Steve O'Connell, Sherman Park Community Association

It [the community partnership] helps build community, and from that effort everyone benefits. The Prospect/Farwell neighborhood has so many opportunities and resources that people don't know about. We're re-discovering the neighborhood in this process." – Sarah Dean, resident for 28 years of the Prospect/Farwell neighborhood

⁶ Kretzmann & McKnight, p. 5.

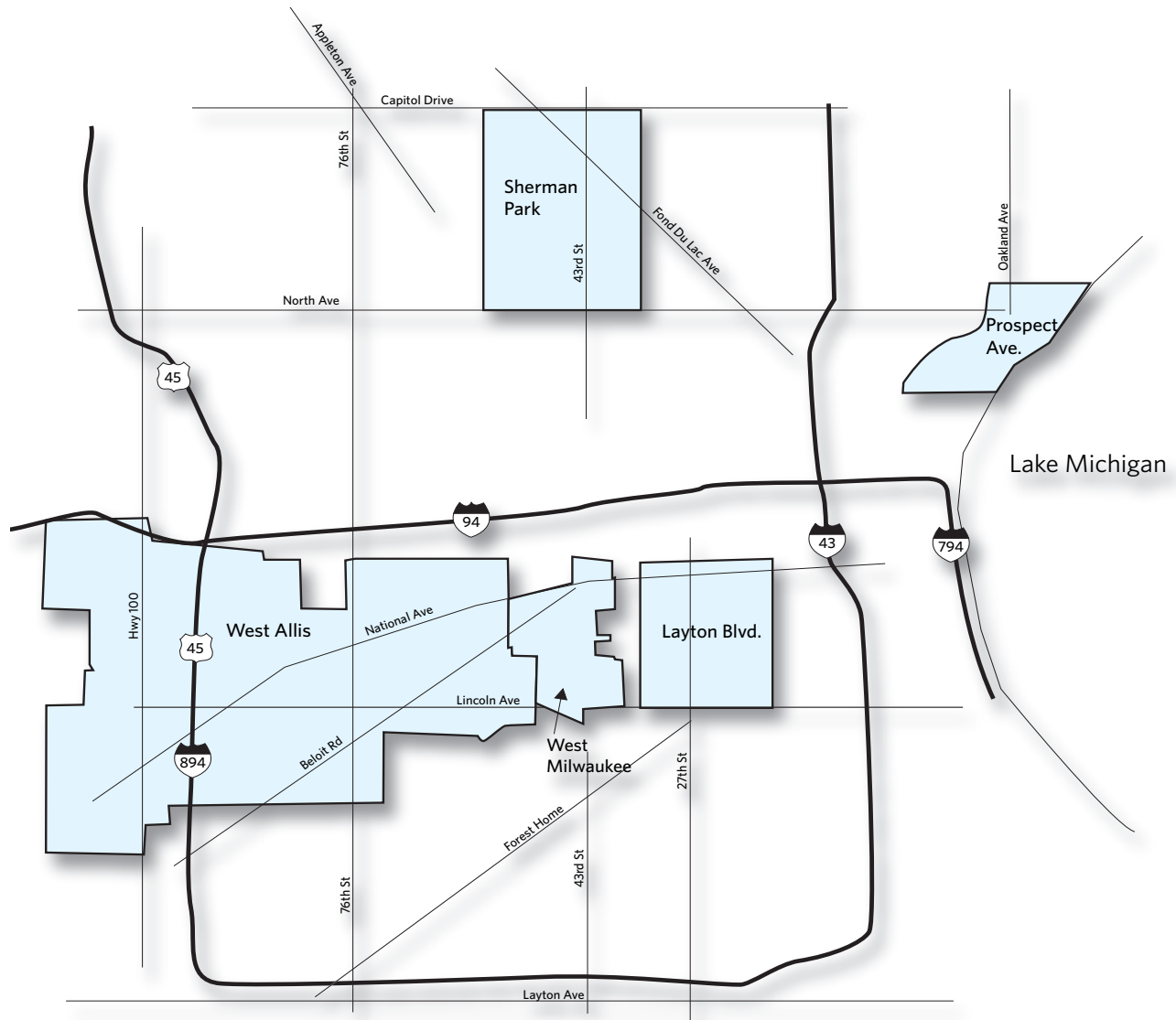
⁷ Tom Mosgaller, Director of the Office of Organizational Development and Training for the City of Madison, Wisconsin, in a presentation to the Lapham Park Venture, 1998. Mr. Mosgaller has served on the faculty of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute at Northwestern University.

Layton Blvd.: Pierce to Lincoln; 16th to 35th

Sherman Park: Capitol to North; 35th to 60th

Prospect/Farwell: Bradford to Ogden; the Lake to the Milwaukee River & Arlington

West Allis/West Milwaukee: The municipal boundaries



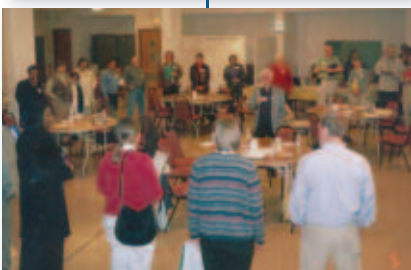
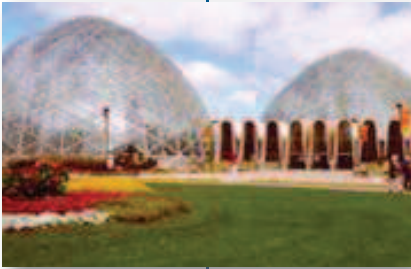
Layton Blvd. is a neighborhood characterized by prominent landmarks such as the Mitchell Park Domes and the boulevard itself with its beautiful plantings and banners overhead. In an area less than 2 square miles, approximately 4,800 adults age 60 and over reside, many of whom live in apartment buildings. Just over 56% of the population is white, 42% are Hispanic and there is a growing Southeast Asian population. This neighborhood is characterized by a high density of older adults and many service providers. Community Care, the lead organization in this initiative, is headquartered in the heart of the Layton Blvd. neighborhood, with a strong track record in providing services to vulnerable older adults.

The **Sherman Park** neighborhood is one of the most recognizable in Milwaukee. Roughly 3,300 older adults reside in Sherman Park, a neighborhood measuring nearly 2 square miles. Most of the housing in the neighborhood is single-family or two-family homes, thus older adults are distributed throughout the neighborhood, making it more challenging to communicate. Approximately 78% of the population is African American, with 16% Caucasian. The neighborhood also is home to a number of Orthodox Jews. Interfaith Older Adult Programs is one of the few service providers in the neighborhood. With its ties to the many congregations in the area and its volunteer base, it leads the Sherman Park partnership.

The **Prospect/Farwell Corridor** is one of the most densely populated and economically diverse neighborhoods in the city of Milwaukee. People over the age of 65 are living in million dollar condominiums overlooking Lake Michigan, with low-income public housing, single-family homes, multi-family homes and everything in-between. The population is predominantly white (90%) and approximately 20% of the population is over the age of 65. The neighborhood has several large congregate living communities with robust services available for older adults. The neighborhood is undergoing a renaissance of sorts with the building of condominiums, pedestrian targeted retail, and revitalization of neglected housing stock. While these developments are generally positive, they pose potential problems for older adults in the form of rising housing costs, increases in traffic, and the introduction of younger residents not used to living along side older adults.

The cities of **West Allis and West Milwaukee** comprise our fourth community. Suburbs of Milwaukee, they are home to a combined total of 65,455 people. Over 17% of the population is age 65 and over. West Allis/West Milwaukee has several senior apartment buildings and many single-family homes. This working-class community has a strong reputation for its commitment to older adults, as evidenced by the popular West Allis Senior Center and the West Allis Commission on Aging. The West Allis Health Department is the lead agency in this community, with Interfaith Older Adult Programs playing a supporting role in getting the partnership off the ground, primarily through a survey of community older adults. Based upon lessons learned in West Allis, plans call for replicating this type of "start-up assistance model" in other municipalities around Milwaukee County, with a governmental unit as the lead agency.

While these four communities vary in terms of size, density of older adults, and richness of services, the partnerships in each are led by strong organizations with older adults at the center of their missions. The common themes among older adults in these communities: a desire to be connected to the community and to other people; a need for more information about options available to older people and their caregivers, a concern about safety, and the need for more transportation for older adults.



Key components in conducting asset mapping & gathering initial data

There are three characteristics that define the asset-based community development process: it starts with capacities (not weaknesses), is internally focused, and is relationship driven.⁸ – Kretzmann & McKnight, Asset-Based Community Development Institute

- Map where the older adults live; compile preliminary data regarding density, racial and ethnic background, age, gender, crime rate
- Map the following neighborhood assets: senior apartment buildings, senior meal sites, civic resources, churches, schools, health care clinics, grocery stores, restaurants, banks, retail, commercial services, parks, other places older adults might congregate

Summary: Gather as much information as possible about the community, utilizing Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology to provide data and maps at the block level.

In **Layton Blvd.**, a graduate student class in Urban Planning from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee conducted a thorough assessment of the neighborhood, primarily using GIS technology and the City of Milwaukee's COMPASS program, which provided crime data at the block level.

In **Sherman Park**, most of the asset-mapping work was done by a Senior Aide temporarily assigned to the project, using the COMPASS program as well.

I am struck by the fact that a coffee shop [The Sherman Perk] can play a very important role in bringing older adults into contact with younger adults It seems that everyone knows each other's name at The Perk and they seem to know the stories of the older adults who hang out there on a regular basis. It is a safe, hospitable, intergenerational place for all generations who call Sherman Park home. – Steve O'Connell, Sherman Park Community Association

Step 2: Key components in building and nurturing the community partnership

Building key relationships and managing communications well allows us to develop the resources we need to sustain our partnership. Six tools for sustaining partnerships: 1) reveal resources among partners; 2) allow partners to select their level of involvement; 3) integrate strategies (develop goals and outcomes); 4) incorporate self-interests, "Taking the time to honor others' agendas moves ours along faster."; 5) commence actions; 6) align responsibilities. – Mike Winer, 4Results Together⁹

⁸ Kretzmann & McKnight, p. 9.

⁹ Mike Winer, founder of 4Results: Together, in a powerpoint presentation to the Community Partnerships for Older Adults Program at its annual meeting in Bloomfield, Colorado on September 14, 2005.

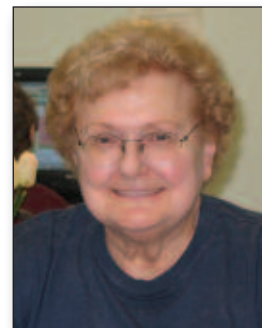
- Invite organizations working with older adults to be a part of the effort
- Identify and invite older adult leaders to be a part of the effort
- Form a group of “community ambassadors,” e.g., older adult residents who agree to meet on a regular basis, providing input and feedback throughout the planning process
- Invite non-traditional partners to be a part of the effort, e.g., neighborhood and/or business association, city/county political representative, police & fire department representatives, local universities
- Convene first meeting
- Keep minutes; develop workplan with timeline & responsibilities
- Rotate meeting locations, at least initially. Offer food, especially when involving residents
- Develop activities to promote relationship-building among the partners, particularly the older adults

In the Sherman Park area, older adults have entered into meaningful relationships with other older adults. – The Pastoral Team from Capitol Drive Lutheran Church

The glue of successful communities is relationships. The more these relationships are connected, the more deposits we have made in the health of our community. – Tom Mosgaller, Asset-Based Community Development Consultant

Summary: A lot of work goes into developing and nurturing relationships in order to form and sustain a partnership. The first meeting is crucial in terms of setting the tone. Come prepared with data, determine the interests of participants, talk about a vision for the community & successes of other communities, and identify other individuals and groups to involve. At an early point, partners need to discuss what’s potentially in it for them, and what potentially they have to offer. Similarly, the lead agency needs to clearly state its intentions from the beginning in terms of its involvement in the effort and its intended length of commitment, e.g., they are in it for the long haul or they are looking for another partner or partners to assume responsibility at a certain point. As new individuals and groups join the partnership, share minutes and other written materials produced by the partnership and bring them up-to-speed before their first meeting. Also, give the existing members of the partnership and new members an opportunity to get to know one another. It is all about relationships.

Just because seniors are retired, doesn't mean they're retired from their civic duties. – Esther Hussey, founder of the Senior Warriors (Layton Blvd.)



In **Layton Blvd.**, many of the older adults who made up the “ambassadors” group did not know each other. It took several meetings where lunch was shared before they started forming relationships and understanding their group potential. As a way of addressing some of the safety concerns expressed by older adults regarding being uncomfortable with neighborhood youth, the project developed a series of three “peacemaking circles” for older adults and youth from the nearby Boys & Girls Club. The series culminated in a day of planting flowers outside of the newly renovated older adult gathering place – older adults and teens, side by side.

Peacemaking Circles are derived from indigenous cultures and are primarily used to strengthen relationships in a community, e.g., as part of a restorative justice program. Peacemaking Circles provide opportunities for individual and collective empowerment through creative exercises, a structured environment, and established guidelines. As a tool in intergenerational understanding, the Peacemaking Circle movement has gained momentum in Milwaukee County and is spreading throughout the country.¹⁰

In **Layton Blvd.**, the lead organization, Community Care, is headquartered in a building with both the neighborhood branch of the Interfaith Neighborhood Outreach Program and the local neighborhood association, Layton Blvd. Neighbors West. Prior to the development of a community partnership, staff from the programs did not know one another, and therefore did not collaborate. Once the partnership formed, they began to develop personal relationships and an understanding of each program, and most importantly began to see the connections that could be made in helping neighborhood older adults stay in the neighborhood – a goal they all had in common. This relationship-building has become institutionalized now as each partner has benefited from collaboration.

Step 3: Key components in developing a plan

- Outline basic planning process with the workgroup: gather data from and about older adult residents; ask older adults to determine priorities; develop vision, goals, strategies, and outcomes; implement; evaluate
- Define community boundaries & gather more data specific to the community, e.g., at the block level
- Learn about how older people in the community communicate and increase the number of older adults involved in the process
- Develop questions for focus groups, surveys, interviews
- Review data and priorities identified by older adults
- Examine partnership based upon assets and priorities; invite others in
- Be ready to seize opportunities that might be out-of-sequence with the plan

Summary: The development of a plan goes hand-in-hand with the development of the community partnership. Sustaining enthusiasm for the planning process over a long period can be challenging; it is therefore important to plan for some quick wins to build some

¹⁰ For more information re: Peacemaking Circles, see Pranis, Kay, The Little Book of Circle Processes, Pennsylvania: Good Books, 2005.

support for the partnership and its ability to get things done. One way to document success is to create a cache of stories about the lives of community older adults, looking at the changes in their lives as a result of the partnership's efforts.

The survey/interview process is perhaps best done by older adults themselves, either through the formation of an ongoing focus group or by a few older adults interested in this aspect of the project. If there is a neighborhood association, they also may have the capacity to help conduct brief surveys through existing communication mechanisms.

Seek out as many partners as possible because the "whole is greater than the sum of its parts." We can do together something that we cannot do alone. – The Pastoral Team from Capitol Drive Lutheran Church (Sherman Park)

In **Layton Blvd.**, there was strong interest among older adult residents in meeting to discuss neighborhood issues after initial focus group meetings were held. The involved residents became ambassadors for the neighborhood, and met once a month with project staff over lunch to talk about a specific aspect of the project or about information that needed to be communicated to other older adult residents. The ambassador group decided to organize monthly meetings for all neighborhood older adults to participate in, and a series of Town Hall meetings was developed for the local gathering place, a senior center re-named "The Oasis," which has become the hub of activity since the implementation of Connecting Caring Communities. The operator of the senior center, the Milwaukee Public School system, now works with the ambassador group to plan the Town Hall meetings and arrange for speakers that have included the local alderman, county supervisor, state assembly representative, chief of police, sheriff, and others.

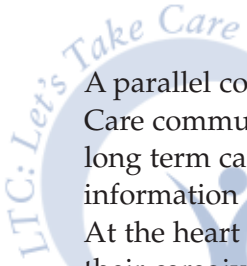
Learning about how older adults in the community communicate, e.g., through a community newspaper, local access TV, building newsletter, coffee shop meetings, internet, etc. will help create awareness of the neighborhood partnership while providing opportunities for participation at various levels. This communication network will become vital once plans have been developed.



Alderman Robert Donovan addresses the crowd at The OASIS (Layton Blvd.)



Sheriff David Clarke at the opening of a new Sheriff's Sub-Station at The OASIS.



A parallel component of Milwaukee's Connecting Caring Communities project is the LTC: Let's Take Care communication campaign designed to increase older adults' (and caregivers') understanding of long term care and how to find it in Milwaukee County. The need to do a better job of providing information about available programs and services was apparent even before the start of the project. At the heart of the LTC: Let's Take Care campaign is a graphic symbol created to help older adults and their caregivers readily identify a service or piece of information linked to long term care for older adults. The campaign also features a website and a planning guide. The campaign is currently being tailored to meet the communication assets and priorities of our Prospect/Farwell community, developing a planning template for replication in other communities as well.

No matter how much time you dedicate to planning, the unforeseen will happen, and the partnership will need to make some quick decisions about direction if opportunities arise that are deemed advantageous to the community. Similarly, some components are likely to generate more enthusiasm and support than others, so periodically stepping away from what is going on, and looking at overall directions is worthwhile.

In **Sherman Park**, project staff learned of a congregation interested in increasing its commitment to the neighborhood in some way as a part of its ministry. It had space available and was open to looking at offering the space as a gathering place for neighborhood older adults. A match was made between the strong desire of older adult residents for a place to call their own, and a congregation's desire to serve others. While the development of a gathering place was a couple of years down the road on the neighborhood's workplan, the timing was right and priorities shifted in order to accommodate this opportunity. It continues to serve as a very visible accomplishment for the neighborhood.

Step 4: Key components in working toward sustainability

"The inside capacity must be there before the outside resources can be effectively leveraged." – Kretzmann & McKnight, Asset-Based Community Development Institute

- Ascertain interests of each workgroup member
- At very first meeting, be clear about lead agency's interests and limitations
- At very first meeting, discuss sustainability over the long term
- Mobilize non-traditional partners who might benefit from building a more elder-friendly community, e.g., local pharmacy, school or youth center, local business association, etc.
- Look at ways to arrange or re-arrange existing community assets to create win-win situations
- Seek in-kind and financial support from community businesses and organizations
- Seek outside funds to support partnership efforts, rather than replace them

Summary: Developing and maintaining a community where older adults are connected to their neighbors and businesses/organizations is an ongoing process. A community may develop a plan that is short-term in nature, or may develop goals that stretch out over a long time period, each requiring various levels of work to maintain a community partnership. As successes happen, partners become willing to continue their efforts. Relationship-building and sharing of resources can lead to new opportunities and a new sense of belonging for all involved.

The community has come together in a stronger way; there is better communication amongst neighbors and others. Individuals feel safer and have an opportunity to be outside of their homes. – Randy Kohl, The OASIS (Layton Blvd.)

Sustainable components in both **Layton Blvd. and Sherman Park:**

- Relationships developed through partnerships
- A central gathering place for seniors in each neighborhood
- Increased knowledge of Interfaith Older Adult Neighborhood Outreach Program as a source of information and assistance in each neighborhood
- The use of Peacemaking Circles with neighborhood youth and older adults
- Perspectives in Aging Film Series and Discussion Guides for repeated use
- Additional programming and resources
- Generations Online software installed at both neighborhood gathering places
- Communications template (currently in development)

Sustainable components in **Layton Blvd.:**

- Enhanced programming and physical design of The Oasis (the neighborhood gathering place) including a fitness center, wellness classes, computer classes, and regular town hall meetings
- Partnership now being led by the Milwaukee Public Schools, operator of The Oasis
- New program developed by partnership member Layton Blvd. West Neighborhood to establish a home maintenance referral service for neighborhood older adults
- Transportation shuttle

Sustainable components in **Sherman Park:**

- Programs and activities available through The Sherman Park Gathering Place including exercise classes, discussion groups, Bible Study, and a walking club
- Monthly column featuring neighborhood older adults in *Sherman Park Today*
- Annual distribution of a calendar for neighborhood older adults, including listing of programs and services
- Training for Sherman Park Block Club Captains re: elder watch issues
- Transportation brochure
- 17 neighborhood older adults have computers from the partnership
- Neighborhood walking club



Checklist of Essential Elements

Key components in choosing a community

- ✓ Identifiable community boundaries/sense of neighborhood identity
- ✓ Strong lead agency anchored in and committed to the community
- ✓ Lead agency or partner organization connected to community older adults
- ✓ Basic knowledge of where the older adults live and the traditional resources available/not available to them

Key components in developing and sustaining a community partnership

- ✓ Invite organizations working with older adults to be a part of the effort
- ✓ Identify and invite older adult leaders to be a part of the effort
- ✓ Form a group of “community ambassadors”, e.g., older adult residents who agree to meet on a regular basis, providing input and feedback throughout the planning process
- ✓ Invite non-traditional partners to be a part of the effort, e.g., neighborhood and/or business association, city/county political representative, police & fire department representatives, local universities
- ✓ Convene first meeting
- ✓ Keep minutes; develop workplan with timeline & responsibilities
- ✓ Rotate meeting locations, at least initially. Offer food, especially when involving residents
- ✓ Develop activities to promote relationship-building among the partners, particularly the older adults

Key components in developing a plan

- ✓ Outline basic planning process with the workgroup: gather data from and about older adult residents; ask older adults to determine priorities; develop vision, goals, strategies, and outcomes; implement; evaluate
- ✓ Define community boundaries & gather more data specific to the neighborhood, e.g., at the block level
- ✓ Learn about how older people in the community communicate and increase the number of older adults involved in the process
- ✓ Develop questions for focus groups, surveys, interviews
- ✓ Review data and priorities identified by older adults
- ✓ Examine partnership based upon priorities and invite others in as needed
- ✓ Be ready to seize opportunities that might be out-of-sequence with the plan

Key components in developing sustainability

- ✓ Ascertain interests of each workgroup member
- ✓ At very first meeting, be clear about lead agency's interests and limitations
- ✓ At very first meeting, discuss sustainability over the long term
- ✓ Mobilize non-traditional partners who might benefit from building a more elder-friendly community, e.g., local pharmacy, school or youth center, local business association etc.
- ✓ Look at ways to arrange or re-arrange existing community assets to create win-win situations
- ✓ Seek in-kind and financial support from community businesses and organizations
- ✓ Seek outside funds to enhance, not replace

The Stories of Sherman Park & Layton Blvd

SHERMAN PARK: Where Everybody Knows Your Name

Lorine Whitney is one of the regulars at The Sherman Park Gathering Place, in what has become a very close-knit group of friends who gather one to three times a week to socialize, obtain information about services, and share a light meal. The Sherman Park Gathering Place is operated by Interfaith Older Adult Programs in partnership with neighborhood organizations such as Capitol Drive Lutheran Church (which provides the space) and Luther Manor (which provides the parish nurse). As Diane Beckley, Interfaith's Director of Activities at The Gathering Place points out, "Lorine never misses a day, nor does she miss a beat. She's been more regular than staff in being at The Gathering Place since it first opened (in the fall of 2005). She's there rain or shine."

Lorine grew up in Missouri and came to Milwaukee thirty-seven years ago; she now resides with her sister in a duplex across from St. Joseph's Regional Medical Center. Prior to the opening of The Sherman Park Gathering Place, Lorine's major activity involved walking, mostly around the park across the street from St. Joe's. Lorine's eyesight causes her great difficulty in walking however, and she finds herself a bit wobbly these days. Lorine started coming to The Sherman Park Gathering Place because in her words, she's "not one to sit around the house doin' nothing." At the age of 68, she does not consider herself to be "old." Her mother once told her, "You're not old til you get to be 100. Then you can say that you're old."

According to Lorine, she has loved coming to The Sherman Park Gathering Place from the start. She is picked up by a volunteer driver and notes that the best part is being around others. "It's very good to be with other people," she emphasizes. Her favorite activities at The Sherman Park Gathering Place are the outings, whether to a lake for fishing or to Racine for a tour of the Jelly Belly factory. In the winter, The Gathering Place offers an indoor walking program, mapped around the sanctuary at the Capitol Drive Lutheran Church, home to The Gathering Place. Lorine adds, "These are things I wouldn't ordinarily be able to do." She also participates in prayer services and the exercise program, and adds that the lunches are very good. She believes that people are the most important part of The Sherman Park Gathering Place. "People here get along so well."

She knows that Diane is there to help if she runs into questions or difficulties. Diane has noticed the importance of The Gathering Place in Lorine's life, now that she has some place to be with other people three mornings a week. Diane notes that "Lorine counts on us to be her eyes and at The Gathering Place, Lorine has good friends." She also now has good information about what's going on in the neighborhood and what's available for seniors. It used to be that Lorine lived for Sundays, when she could go to church. She now has three more days a week to look forward to, when she can join her friends at The Gathering Place."

SHERMAN PARK: Perks of Connecting a Community

Sherman Park, a culturally diverse Milwaukee neighborhood, is home to many older people who have lived in the neighborhood and in their homes for most of their adult lives — yet now feel as if they are strangers. The demographics have changed, some area businesses and institutions have moved out, the housing stock has declined, and the sounds of sirens are not uncommon. The homes lining Sherman Boulevard are still grand, but the surrounding blocks show signs of wear and tear: boarded-up houses here and there, broken-down cars, trash circling around on a windy day. The big grocery store is gone; a few small convenience stores have popped up in its place. Storefront churches now occupy space once owned by shoe stores and other specialty shops.

The older adults in the neighborhood are wary of the people who have moved in — their skin color is different, there are more kids and teenagers in the neighborhood now than in the past; it is noisy. Yet if you asked, they would tell you they want to stay: there is something about remaining in your own home, the home that you cared for in the neighborhood you helped to build...

Ralph, a 66-year-old Sherman Park resident wearing a bright red ball cap, visits the “Sherman Perk” coffee shop regularly. Coffee shop staff notice him; his eyes light up behind a beaten pair of glasses held together with tape as he turns toward the door periodically to greet acquaintances entering the shop. They begin to treat him to free coffee when they observe him becoming increasingly disheveled and raggedy over time. Dave, who works at the counter, takes a particular interest in Ralph, and begins to ask about his situation one day over a cup of coffee. Ralph begins to tell Dave his story...

He learns that Ralph's wife died of Alzheimer's disease recently and he lost his property due to foreclosure. “My wife took care of everything,” Ralph tells Dave. With a developmental disability, Ralph's only income comes from his monthly Social Security check. He has no family or friends to rely on for help. He has found a living arrangement with a large family with six kids. They have agreed to give him a room and pay his remaining bills — in turn, he keeps just \$5 of his check a week as an allowance. He is expected to buy his own food, clothing, etc. with this \$5. He grows hungry and fights with the family. “I just took a piece of pizza out of the fridge and they went nuts, accusing me of stealing. It was just one piece of pizza!” His living space is a couch in their unfinished basement. He has nowhere to turn. He knows that it is not a good situation.

After the conversation, Dave called The Sherman Park Neighborhood Association to seek help for Ralph. The Neighborhood Association is a member of Milwaukee's Connecting Caring Communities Partnership, and is able to field the call and make a direct referral to Interfaith's Sherman Park Neighborhood Outreach Program and in turn the Milwaukee County Department on Aging's Elder Abuse Unit. Finding a place for Ralph to rent was not easy. He had always had someone to take care of him but was now on his own. The first apartment they checked out, right on Capitol Drive, was too noisy. The second was “too far away” according to Ralph; he wanted to

be closer to his usual hangouts. When he said he wanted to “stay in the neighborhood,” he really meant an area of six square blocks. His current housing situation is temporary; he is on the waiting list for permanent housing in a nearby senior apartment building. Interfaith has also helped Ralph get a new pair of glasses.

There are people out there who care. There are businesses and neighborhood associations, and other “non-traditional” avenues for older adults to make connections with the people who care. And there are resources to provide help. Milwaukee’s *Connecting Caring Communities* Partnership finds the people who care, educates them about the needs of older adults in the neighborhood, informs them of the services available, and arms them with “who to call” ready reference material. The Partnership makes the linkages to enable older adults to stay in their homes. It enhances the sense of neighborhood and community among residents, area businesses, congregations, and social service agencies. The Partnership helps to build neighborhoods of caring connections.



LAYTON BOULEVARD: An Oasis of Connection

Marguerite Williams is full of energy. Her day at The Oasis, the gathering place in the Layton Blvd. neighborhood, begins at 9:00 a.m. with Chair Yoga. She admits that it's not always easy to get up early and get over to the gathering place for exercise, but she doesn't want to be shown up by her fellow exercisers, most of who are in their 70s and 80s; Marguerite is just 63. After yoga, there is either a presentation or an art class to attend, or it might be piano lessons or blood pressure screening. On Wednesdays, she can be found in the Knitters' Room. Though she tried knitting and just didn't get the hang of it, she loves being with the women who knit and sits in on the session once a week to hear about their lives, exchange recipes, and build the bonds of friendship. She stays for lunch on Wednesdays and eats with the knitting group.

Marguerite loves being around older people and always has. Her experience as a clerk in a mental health clinic has enabled her to develop an understanding of where others are coming from, so she doesn't mind that she's often the youngest person in her classes at The Oasis. For Marguerite, it's all about the structure provided by the gathering place, an opportunity to be with other people, and the chance to work on maintaining her health and fitness. She recommends places like The Oasis for anyone who retires in order to avoid the depression that many sink into after a lifetime of work.

She knows how difficult it is to exercise when she's home alone, and her doctor has impressed upon her the importance of staying fit – through surgery and exercise she has lost 150 lbs. since first coming to The Oasis 2 ½ years ago!

Marguerite lives alone, about a 7 minute drive from the Center, which she is able to get to on her own. She knows that she's someone who could stay at home for days and days, so is glad to have a place like The Oasis to get her up and out. She doesn't mind being one of the few African American older adults who attends. She says The Oasis is full of interesting people who've led interesting lives, and she's doing her best to get her friends and neighbors to join her. Recently, she dropped off an Interfaith brochure written in Spanish for her neighbor who is Puerto Rican. If her neighbor won't come, she knows that she can call on Margarita Garcia of Interfaith to make a home visit.

When asked about safety in the neighborhood, Marguerite reports no feelings of great concern, though she is naturally a safety-conscious person. The people at The Oasis watch out for each other as they come and go, and it really helps to have the Sheriff's Community Substation located in the building, especially since the Sheriff's signs are displayed prominently right outside The Oasis.

As she and her fellow participants sat at the outdoor café/patio area last summer, they came up with their dream for the neighborhood: the City could buy the run down, dilapidated buildings directly across from The Oasis, rehab them, and convert them for use as senior apartments. Marguerite thinks this would go a long way in making the Layton Blvd. neighborhood a "corridor of aging excellence."

Connecting Caring Communities thanks its many Partners!

LAYTON BLVD. NEIGHBORHOOD PARTNERSHIP

Susan Apthorp, The OASIS
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Sandy Ceranski, UW-Milwaukee
Patricia Ann Davison, Historic Layton Blvd. Association
Barb Estrada, Luther Manor
Jennifer Evans, Milwaukee Christian Center
Rob Frediani, Institute for Collaborative Health Interventions
Margarita Garcia-Guerrero, Interfaith Older Adult Programs – Near Southside
Neighborhood Outreach Program
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Chet Kaminski, Milwaukee County Department on Aging
Randy Kohl, The OASIS and the Milwaukee Department of Recreation
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David Lerman, Milwaukee County Office of the District Attorney
Barbara McKillop, Layton Blvd. West Neighbors
Jennifer Muschowski, Milwaukee County Department on Aging
Jeanne Prochnow, Community Care
Prue Smith, Luther Manor
Joe Trevino, Boys & Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee
Gerald Weisman, UW-Milwaukee

SHERMAN PARK NEIGHBORHOOD PARTNERSHIP

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Cathleen Callen, St. Joseph's Hospital/Wheaton Franciscan Health Care
Judy D'Amato, Neighborhood Resident
Julie Ellis, St. Joseph's Hospital/Wheaton Franciscan Health Care
Jim Hiller, Neighborhood Resident
S. Adele Hofschulte, St. Joseph's Hospital/Wheaton Franciscan Health Care
Ted John, Milwaukee Intergenerational Intercultural Community Connection
David Lerman, Milwaukee County Office of the District Attorney
Shelly Lubus, 7th District - Milwaukee Police Department

Sharon Neitzel, Hadley Terrace Apartments
Steve O'Connell, Sherman Park Community Association
Bob Odin, Sherman Perk
Julie Pekarske, Luther Manor
Rev. Tim Perkins, Sherman Park Interfaith Neighborhood Outreach Board
Prue Smith, Luther Manor
Mike Soika, YWCA-CDC
SPARC (Clergy representing 16 congregations)
Rev. Keith Stanley, Neighborhood Resident
Rev. Lowell Timm and the entire pastoral team, Capitol Drive Lutheran Church
Willie Wade, City of Milwaukee Alderman
Lena's Supermarket
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Debbie Zemel, Chai Point

WEST ALLIS/WEST MILWAUKEE PARTNERSHIP

(To be developed by lead agencies Interfaith Older Adult Programs and the City of West Allis Health Department)

Connecting Caring Communities is organized and led by:

- ❖ Community Care
- ❖ Creatonomy, Inc.
- ❖ Interfaith Older Adult Programs
- ❖ Milwaukee Aging Consortium
- ❖ Milwaukee County Commission on Aging
- ❖ Milwaukee County Department on Aging



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Visit our websites:

www.milwaukeeccc.com and **www.letstakecare.org**

Special thanks to partner organization Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare for the design and publication of this guide. Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare is a not-for-profit organization and one of the largest integrated regional health care delivery systems in Wisconsin. Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare is committed to living out the healing ministry of Jesus by providing exceptional and compassionate health care service that promotes the dignity and well-being of the people they serve.



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